

Government regulations of industry in NEP Russia during the period 1921-1923 and how it worked in practice with particular reference to Siberia

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ABSTRACT.

The overall aim of this research is to investigate a regulated state mechanism established in economic relations between the Soviet state and industry during the period of New Economic Policy (NEP) in Russia in 1921-23. Within this paper, the characteristics of the processes of denationalization, leasing of enterprises, organization of trusts and syndicates, search for the new forms of organization and management of industrial production are presented. The research focuses attention on laws and regulations in industrial area. Historical evidence suggest that co-existence of various property forms and lease relations during the NEP period could not lead to the fully operational industrial enterprises, including large ones, since full-fledged market environment is necessary for market to function successfully.

Keywords: new economic policy, Siberia, industry, nationalization, denationalization, lease, trust, syndicate.

Palabras clave: nueva política económica, Siberia, industria, nacionalización, desnacionalización, arrendamiento, fideicomiso, sindicato.

Las regulaciones gubernamentales de la industria en la NEP Rusia durante el período 1921-1923 y cómo funcionó en la práctica con referencia particular a Siberia

Resumen. El objetivo general de esta investigación es investigar un mecanismo estatal regulado establecido en las relaciones económicas entre el estado soviético y la industria durante el período de Nueva Política Económica (NEP) en Rusia en 1921-23. Dentro de este documento, se presentan las características de los procesos de desnacionalización, arrendamiento de empresas, organización de fideicomisos y sindicatos, búsqueda de las nuevas formas de organización y gestión de la producción industrial. La investigación centra la atención en las leyes y normativas en el ámbito industrial. La evidencia histórica sugiere que la coexistencia de varias formas de propiedad y las relaciones de arrendamiento durante el período de la NEP no podría llevar a las empresas industriales totalmente operativas, incluidas las grandes, ya que el entorno de mercado completo es necesario para que el mercado funcione con éxito.

Palabras clave: nueva política económica, Siberia, industria, nacionalización, desnacionalización, arrendamiento, confianza, sindicato.

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1. Introduction

The story of ourselves becomes richer the more we know about, the more we study our own historical experience. Such issues as co-existence of planned and market mechanisms of governmental regulation that affected economic activity, introduction of self-financing, etc in NEP Russia have always been of great interest for researchers.

Lev Kafengauz, one of the economic theorists who lived during the NEP period and was actively involved in the process since its very beginning, in his monograph "Evolution of Industrial Production in Russia" (1994) focused on the problem of restoring the domestic market and monetary commodity exchange that recreated the equivalent links between industrial and agricultural producers. Having chosen the opposition between directive planning and

free market competition as the main thesis, V. Mau in his study (1993) focused on the methodology of the centralized planning mechanism in NEP Russia. Likewise, I. Orlov (2002) and I. Bystrova (1993) primarily investigated the negative effects of accelerated industrialization due to the introduction of the centralized planning mechanism in the USSR. The works of Western NEP researchers Peter J. Boettke (1990) and Sheldon L. Richman (2001) deal with the authoritarian policies of the Communist government and the ruling Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) which led to the end of the period of New Economic Policy in Russia.

Thus, many of the traditional explanations given by both Russian and Western historians for the problems of NEP Russia and organization and management of its industry during 1920s require re-examination. For this reason, it becomes relevant to start with defining conditions that could facilitate the fully operational small and large industrial enterprises.

In the early 1920s Soviet Russia was on the verge of economic and social disintegration and its industry was practically inoperative and in a state of disrepair. Since Russia was an agrarian country, the Bolsheviks understood that "World Revolution Dream" could not come true without developed industry to say nothing about the possibility for the Communist Government to retain its power.

In Siberia, the post-war devastation was aggravated by the terrible famine that swept the region in 1921-1924 (Baksheev, 2013). Against this background curtailment of commodity-money relations led to the serious disruption in the existing economic ties between the city and the countryside and, consequently, Siberian agriculture scaled down to subsistence farming. The volume of cottage industry reduced significantly as well as its marketability. According to V. Konovalov, in comparison with the year 1913, the total number of Siberian handicraftsmen and artisans fell by 1,7 times and accounted to 92,800 people. At the same time, the displacement of small-scale cottage producers by large industrial enterprises was slowed down: in 1920s, more than 90% of the industrial enterprises in Siberia were artisanal and semi-artisan (1995, p. 75). The main aim of the Communist Government in industrial sphere was to expropriate and nationalize small industrial enterprises. But initially, in ideological commitment to destroy capitalism, large and medium industrial enterprises had been nationalized.

Introduction

The relevance of the present study is determined by the current understanding of the complexity of such massive cultural phenomena as “rock music culture” and by the need to find theoretical and methodological pinpoints that are pertinent to those phenomena. There is a multitude of various definitions of rock music (as well as Russian rock music in particular) and each of them promotes one or more characteristics of the rock music culture as a special type of discourse [62]. Those definitions vary based upon which aspect is at the forefront according to the researchers. For instance, M. Solodova and E. Popova highlight the distinct subcultural impact of the Russian rock music: “The main extralinguistic characteristic of RMC [rock music culture - our interpretation] is, above all, its subcultural attribution, which determines all other traits of both RMC itself and its narrative. RMC <...> is a combination of beliefs and values which vigorously reject the predominating culture and offer an alternative way of navigating through modern reality.” [49, p. 79–80].

While Russian rock music and rock music culture is country-specific, it is a vital part of global rock music movement system, in terms of ethnolinguistic world view content. National researchers directly highlight the logocentric nature of Russian rock music, which according to them includes a special lyrical intensity of the narrative, as well as Russian rock lyricists being included in the overall Russian culture system:

“For a variety of reasons (mainly because of the logocentric nature of Russia’s centuries-old culture, the rich literary, folklore and song traditions, the “hunger” for words which stems from the age of “stagnation”) the verbal aspect of Russian national rock music compositions becomes dominant”. [56, p. 3].

Being part of the phenomenon, A. Bashlachev identified the substance of Russian rock music: “Electric sparks in my chest. / Drop your hats on the snow and let them ring louder. / Rock ‘n’ roll, glorious paganism. / I love the season of the bells” [7]. K. Kinchev offers his version: “Tender hour, time of “Che” / Stars brocaded onto my shoulder / Flying in the rays, under the spell of doom / Labeled by the dark ROCK” [30]. In a Red Star newspaper interview, he revealed: “Rock music cannot exist outside of a crisis. Because it’s metaphysical, like the soul. In fact, rock music is a state of soul in itself. Show business may have ups and downs, crises...” [61].

Rock music represents a heterogenous, compositive phenomenon, which is anthropological and social in its nature, where none of its components may serve as a facilitating paradigm for the whole concept. On top of that, each of

The manifest public opposition to the policy of War Communism and the threat to the existence of the Communist Government forced the Bolshevik Party to retreat from all-out socialism and the plans for "World Revolution". In March 1921, the anti-Bolshevik armed rebellion in Kronstadt (the "Kronstadt revolt" in Soviet terminology) held under the slogan "All power to the Soviets and not to the parties" persuaded even the radical Left-wing to abandon the policy of War Communism.

In its place, Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy, which started with the abolition of the detested food-requisitioning campaign and a return to a limited market economy. The NEP model of development was imposed chiefly to appease the still hostile peasantry, whilst the Bolshevik party employed the full weight of its propaganda machine to engender a new cooperative "link" relationship with peasantry in the attempt to "strengthen the alliance of working class and working peasantry". In the summer of 1921, industrial crisis became evident and any further delays would pose a serious threat to the country.

The primary purpose of the current study is to investigate the Communist Government measures to regulate industry during 1921-23 and how those measures worked in practice, with particular reference to Siberia.

Research hypothesis: co-existence of various property forms and leasing relations during the NEP period could not lead to the fully operational industrial enterprises, including large ones, since full-fledged market environment is necessary for market to function successfully.

In our opinion, the results of the research presented below confirm that the purpose of the current study has been achieved and the hypothesis has been confirmed.

2. Methods

The study became possible through a historical approach to the material, which encompasses data on the analysis of historical sources on the problem of government regulations of industry during the first years of the NEP as well as the legal acts of that period.

3. Results

In the summer of 1921, several decrees of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR backed by the resolution of the Labour and Defense Council of the RSFSR paved the way for introducing New Economic Policy (Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR "On the Procedures for Leasing Enterprises Subordinated

to the Supreme Council of the National Economy", 1921; Decree of the Central Executive Committee, Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR "On Handicraft and Cottage Industry", 1921; Decree of the Central Executive Committee, Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR "On Fishing Cooperation", 1921; Resolution of the Labour and Defense Council of RSFSR "Basic Measures on Rehabilitation of Large Industry and Development of Production", 1921). The period of NEP can roughly be divided into three stages: the first stage – since 1921 till 1923 – was the period of denationalization, leasing of enterprises, organization of trusts and syndicates and development of market relations; the second stage – since 1923 till 1927 – restoration of industry and search for new forms of organization and management in industry; and the third one – since 1927 till 1929 – the period of the end of NEP and the return to centralized planning mechanism.

Analyzing the transformations of industrial sector of Soviet economy, it is necessary to note here that, on the one hand, a limited return to free market economic took place. On the other, those transformations took place against the background of the nationalized industry and the state adherence to what Lenin called the "commanding heights" of the economy (Program of the Communist International, 1933). In terms of introduction of NEP in industry, it is worth mentioning that the Soviet state nationalized privately-owned enterprises and established a system of economic relations built on the direct involvement of the Government in regulation of industry at every level: enterprise, industry, territory and, even, reproduction phases.

The study investigates the first stage of NEP, the main features of which in the industry in contrast to the period of War Communism were:

- denationalization of industrial enterprises,
- leasing of enterprises,
- organization of trusts and syndicates.

The findings show that in Siberia in the period prior to NEP there had been nationalized more than 1640 industrial enterprises, which employed from 80 to 90 thousand workers according to various data. To function effectively the limited restoration of free market economic relations required regularised legal procedures. Thus, in Siberia, the Decree of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee (Sibrevkom) "On Possibility to Transfer Industrial Enterprises to Cooperative Organizations, Private Persons and Foreign Concessions" of July 21, 1921 started the process of denationalization (Borodulina, 2018). Under the Decree local Soviet officials, in the first place, freed themselves

from cottage-craft and artisan enterprises, which employed two or three workers and had capacity up to no more than five horsepower. Larger industrial enterprises were still state-owned. By October 1, 1922, the campaign aimed to denationalize industry came virtually to a standstill. Out of 1640 nationalized industrial enterprises, 739 (or 45%) were denationalized and, thus, more than 90% of enterprises returned to their previous owners (handicraftsmen and artisans) (Demchik, 1999).

In the late summer and early autumn of 1921 in different provinces of Siberia, a campaign to transfer enterprises to lease began. Initially, it was quite active as provincial Councils of National Economy (CNE) were in a hurry to get rid of small inoperative enterprises. The autumn of 1921 and the winter of 1922 was the period when local authorities and private persons entered into lease agreements most actively.

Lease agreements stipulated continued manufacturing of key production and smooth functioning of an enterprise. Rental fees (a share of the output (5-25%)) were paid to the state in kind or in cash. Primarily, local Soviet officials leased light and food industrial enterprises because those enterprises did not require neither significant working capital nor initial costs and produced goods that were in good demand. Almost half of the enterprises returned to the previous owners who well aware of the characteristics of the production process. They leased their previously owned enterprises, personnel, raw products, materials and fuel. As a rule, duration of lease agreements was up to 3 years given the national economic situation as well as the policy of the local authorities. Siberian CNEs did not seek to encourage leasing for longer periods and, by the winter of 1922, leasing policy was actually abandoned (Borodulina, 2014, p. 46-47).

The cost of production manufactured at enterprises leased was significantly higher than produced by state-owned enterprises. The high cost of produce could be attributed to the industrial structure which was, as rule, involved in production of food and consumer goods, the cost of which, in terms of man-day, was higher than in mining industry, metallurgy or heavy engineering. Besides, longer working hours, low-paid child labor and other violations of labor and tax laws placed enterprises leased in a good position to reap the benefits of additional profits. Entrepreneurs who leased industrial enterprises for the short-term were not interested in investing in reconstruction of enterprises, purchasing of new equipment, repair works or better working conditions, etc.

The nationalized large-scale industry reflected all the attributes of War Communism. Private capital did not find a niche in large-scale industry. Technical equipment, staffing and predominantly used manual labor at large-scale privately owned enterprises deprived them of the possibility to compete against state-owned enterprises.

In NEP Russia, the main form of large manufacturing and mining industries were trusts. Trusts were organized in accordance with the Labour and Defense Council of RSFSR decree on "Basic Measures on Rehabilitation of Large Industry and Development of Production" in August 12, 1921. The enterprises, which were "the largest, more technically equipped, better organized and appropriately located" from a particular industry, were subject to the decree (Resolution of the Labour and Defense Council of RSFSR "Basic Measures on Rehabilitation of Large Industry and Development of Production", 1921).

Having organized trusts, the Communist government nevertheless remained the sole proprietor for both means of production and profits. Trusts could only dispose of working capital but even that limited independence was not always given to trusts. By uniting enterprises into trusts and subordinating them to governmental economic bodies, the government created extremely favorable conditions for itself to stick to the centralized planning mechanisms. In accordance with the so-called production (production-financial) programs, the government defined the planned performance for trusts. Though its indicators grew annually, the main characteristics were finished product, financing, wages, labor content, the size of profits and participation in trade operations. Having the rights for independence and self-financing, trusts since the very beginning were deprived of both independence and self-financing. Such combination of planned and market economies had certain advantages, but far more – disadvantages.

Trusts were initially set up in the autumn of 1921 as legal entities, independent in operational and economic activities and supposed to work on self-supporting basis. If the central government recognized the principle of non-interference in the economic activities of trusts, then, accordingly, it should have let them be independent to regulate their prices and sell their goods. But the government recognized also the need to stick to economic management with the elements of the distribution of goods in the interests of the itself. That was largely achieved through government mandatory contact. Through governmental regulatory bodies, trusts were to produce

goods at fixed, state-established prices, which almost never corresponded to current ones and were significantly lower than the cost of production. The government withdrew very often goods for free. Thus, trusts were hard-wired to have losses, which the central government replaced from the budget or, more precisely, at the expense of agricultural producers. Thereby, there was formed the mechanism of authoritarian distribution which had nothing in common with the ideas of free market economy. Those governmental regulations affected primarily heavy industry trusts, which were supposed to provide the industry with raw products, materials, fuel, and equipment.

There had been organized 38 trusts in Siberia by the 1st of October 1922. Siberian trusts united 184 industrial enterprises and employed 31,400 workers (77.6% of employed by state-owned industry). Being the leading branches of Siberian industry coal and gold mining enterprises were united in trusts; central trusts were under the central direction of the Supreme Council of National Economy (SCNE), the central state body involved in administrating of the national economy in the USSR; in the same way, local trusts were under direction of regional economic councils. Syndicates, legal entities supervised by the Supreme Council of National Economy, were designed to sell produce manufactured by trusts and to distribute mandatory contracts among the enterprises of the trust. By the end of 1922 in the RSFSR, 16 syndicates were established and they served 176 trusts (68% of the total amount in Russia) (Sovnarkhozy, 2009).

Since trusts came into being as entities to carry out operational management of industrial enterprises, the Siberian Industrial Bureau of the SCNE having been the body concerned with management of enterprises directly turned into the body that started to regulate and plan the activities of trusts. However, the Siberian Bureau supervised only a limited number of industrial enterprises. Reorganization of the administrative bodies was carried out at the level of local economic councils; their production departments were reorganized into trusts, technical departments of the economic councils regulated industrial performance.

During the period between 1921 and 1922 state trusts could have been reorganized into joint-stock companies, which at that time were widespread in the forms of syndicates or unit investment companies (associations), etc. The Decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars "On State Industrial Enterprises that Operate

on Commercial Basis" (1923), on the first count offered a comprehensive legal basis for a state-owned enterprise to function as an integral whole in NEP Russia. But equally important is the second characteristic of the decree mentioned above, it excluded the possibility for large-scale industry of any other form of property except for state-owned to arise. That idea was clearly expressed by M. Tomskey, the chairman of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, later in 1928, "We do not and cannot have public-corporate industry – all our industry is state-owned industry, its every form and type are subject to governmental regulations" (How NEP Was Abandoned, 2000, p. 255).

Thus, 1923 was the year when industrial trusts were divided into three large groups. The first group included trusts, which produced mainly for the market; they defined sales markets, set prices for raw products, materials and could even influence the price of goods by themselves. They were mainly presented by light and food industry trusts and were subject to republican, regional and provincial regulations, although they also worked based on government mandatory contract. Though trusts were self-help organisations, in fact, they were lame ducks, they have little real power as they could not distribute their profits since the profits belonged not to the trust but to the state as the owner of the trust. In Siberia, the trusts were represented by Siberian Butter Trust (Sibmaslotrest), East Siberian Regional Trust of Fermenting and Non-alcoholic Industry (Brodtest), East Siberian Regional Trust for Processing of Agricultural Produce (Vostsibselprom), East Siberian Territory Leather Industry Trust (VostSibkozhtrest), etc.

The second group included heavy industry trusts and in Siberia the second group was represented, for example, by Regional East Siberian Industrial Construction Trust (Vostsibpromstroy). As a rule, those trusts were obliged to work on the basis of mandatory contract at arbitrary prices. Most of them were unprofitable but the state did not want to let them go into commercially driven environment for reasons primarily ideological.

The third group of trusts included mining trusts, for example, State East Siberian Trust for Gold Mining (Vostsibzoloto) or Siberian Forest Trust of Forest industry, etc. Having been established back in 1906-1914 based mainly of foreign capital, those trusts were making the major contribution to foreign currency earnings of the Soviet state (Baksheev, 2016, p. 11).

After the “price crisis” of 1923, the Communist government was particularly active to intervene in pricing system, with the aim of closing the “scissors gap” between prices for agricultural and industrial produce. The vast majority of the party officials were sure that the mismatch between prices for agricultural and industrial products had caused the crisis. Indeed, such divergence of prices really existed but it was not the cause but the consequence. After all, agriculture consumed only one-fourth of industrial output. The main consumers of industrial production were the city and industry. The reason is that, having received in the summer of 1923 a special regulation of the Supreme Economic Council that ordered trusts to make maximum profit their top priority, the trusts began to sharply raise prices. In search of a quick breakthrough in the crisis, the government forced the trusts to cut down soaring prices. Although the emergency measures helped, market ideology – salability – was distorted. Better prices resulted in the fact that consumers absorbed through increased consumption a large part of what might have been marketed.

Thus, the market was deprived of its main function – to regulate supply and demand. Since then a shortage of goods stayed with the USSR forever. Regulation of social produce in conditions of material and financial imbalance put the industrial enterprises, which were united in trusts deprived of economic independence, in extremely difficult conditions. Since the onset of NEP such a system of management offered certain incentives, but later it hindered the development of the Soviet industry.

The main regulatory mechanism for trusts at that time was the production and credit plan, aimed not to restore the market conditions but to find a way out of short-term economic problems. However, solo state regulation could not be a decisive factor in successful implementation of the advantaged offered by free market conditions. Nevertheless, leading party industrial officials saw the way out of the crisis in managerial changes in industry but not in changing the approach to the problem of state regulation.

It should be noted that some trusts began to give the enterprises more independence, allowing them to store up raw materials and sell their produce. First of all, these were trusts involved in production of goods of mass consumption. However, trusts operating through government subsidies were reluctant to let enterprises to become self-financing organisations even after the decree issued by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee

and the Council of People's Commissars on "Regulations on State Industrial Trusts" (1927), according to which enterprises should have become self-financing entities.

The system of organization and management had significant shortcomings indeed but the reason for the collapse of NEP was in the approaches to management and were evident since its onset. In early 1923, development of the concept of self-financing was transformed into the problem plan-market relationship. No matter how we interpret the plan today, one thing is certain – the entire Communist government strategy for building the socialist sector stemmed from the idea that the plan was the genuinely socialist way of development that opposed free market and limited its influence. The possibility to regulate industry through free market mechanisms was not even considered.

4. Conclusion

Summarizing the results of the study, we conclude that that introduction of the New Economic Policy benefitted both denationalization and lease of Siberian small industry, but the reforms were insufficient and the years 1921, 1922 and 1923 inherited features of War Communism. As the result handicraft and cottage industry could not overcome crisis, development of privately owned industrial enterprises was hampered by restrictions on the size of fixed productive assets and lack of financing, but even more, by the policy of the Soviet government aimed to preserve the "commanding heights" of economy.

In this regard, it is worth noting here that mixed market economy of extensive state ownership coexistent small-scale capitalist enterprise, a market relationship with individual producers and leasing relations is not sufficient for market to function properly. Market require proper economic environment for economic entities to exist. NEP Russia lacked capacity to sufficiently regulate industry and failed to create appropriate conditions for large-scale industry.

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